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AUTHOR Wilson, Patricia J.; Blake, Martha
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ABSTRACT

A national survey of 1,000 principals and 1,000 school media specialists indicates that principals have very little knowledge about what really happens in the school library media center. Ten statements are presented to enable readers to test their own knowledge about library media centers. The responses make it clear that principals have had little training about media centers and have little knowledge of what skills librarians have acquired. The multiple tasks the media specialist performs are highlighted. Most principals wait until an accreditation visit is scheduled before turning their attention to the library, but library evaluation should be an ongoing process. Ten suggestions are given for ways to learn more about the media center. They include visits with other schools and regular discussions with the media specialist about the center's activities. (SLD)

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STREAMLINED SEMINAR

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STREAMLINED SEMINAR

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

VOLUME 12, NUMBER 3 DECEMBER 1993

What Principals Should Know About Library Media Centers

Patricia J. Wilson and Martha Blake

"Most principals don't have a clue about what really goes on in a school library."

This comment reflects the frustration expressed by many of the school library media specialists in a recent national survey of 1,000 principals and 1,000 media specialists. In response to the question, "Are principals knowledgeable concerning school library media centers?" an overwhelming 90 percent of the 572 responding media specialists answered "no." Even more surprising, however, was that 68 percent of the 423 responding principals agreed with them!

To determine your own level of expertise about library media centers, try answering "true" or "false" to the following statements:

1. University preparation programs provide principals with good training concerning library media centers.

2. The principal is the only person in the school with training in administration, curriculum, law, budget, and staff development.

3. *Information Power* is Alvin Toffler's latest book.

4. A library media specialist only checks out and reshelves books.

5. Principals cannot evaluate library media specialists because they do not teach.

6. Curriculum committees work best when library media specialists are not included.

7. Flexible scheduling died with the open classroom.

8. CD-ROM technology is used only in the computer lab.

9. Media centers are evaluated only before an accreditation visit.

10. The library is the media specialist's territory; principals should not be involved.

If you answered "true" to *any* of these statements, you need to know more about library media centers and the people who run them. Check your answers with this information, based on survey comments by principals and media specialists:

1. ***False.*** University preparation programs do *not* offer adequate training. In response to a survey question that asked: "Should the management and function of school libraries be a part of the principal's training?" 90 percent of the media specialists and 78

Patricia J. Wilson is assistant professor of library science at the University of Houston-Clear Lake in Texas.

Martha Blake is assistant professor of educational leadership at the University of Houston-Clear Lake.

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percent of the principals answered "yes."

Yet comments by principals indicated that most of their preparation programs provided little, if any, information about library media centers. Both principals and media specialists recommended that universities include such information in their courses and internships (Wilson and Blake 1993).

2. ***False.*** The media specialist's certification program provides training in administration, curriculum, budget, law, and staff development similar to that of principals, but with an emphasis on library management applications. Most library certification programs require at least 21 hours in specialized course work and an internship.

Part of the program focuses on management of the library media center and supervision of personnel, as well as extensive training in curriculum. Media specialists must know not only subject areas and content, but also scope and sequence, learning style differences, and instructional strategies.

Library specialists receive training in preparing budgets, with specific emphasis on cost effectiveness and materials selection, including print and non-print resources, computers, and supplies. They are also required to know the legal aspects of copyright laws, intellectual freedom, and First Amendment rights.

The areas of expertise shared by librarians and principals provide a basis for a partnership dedicated to fulfillment of the school's mission. It is important for principals to recognize such media specialist competencies as the selection and use of literature, reference materials, and other print and non-print materials, plus skills in computer and audiovisual technology.

3. ***False.*** *Information Power*, published in 1988 by the American Library Association and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, provides national guidelines for library media centers. While principals don't need to read it from cover to cover, it provides a good look at what a well developed library program should be, and addresses topics ranging from the role and responsibilities of the media specialist to specific guidelines for personnel, facilities, resources, and equipment.

4. ***False.*** Library media specialists complain that many principals think that all they do all day is check out and reshelve books. While those may indeed be their most visible activities, what is not as visible are the countless hours spent in selecting, ordering, cataloging, and processing books and materials, working with individual students, providing reference service, and staying current on book reviews.

The surveyed media specialists urge principals to become more aware of what they do in the hope that it will eliminate such practices as using the media center as "a place to park kids" and "a dumping ground for discipline problems."

5. ***False.*** The media specialist has three distinct roles and responsibilities that principals must clearly understand before evaluation. The first and most familiar is that of the *information specialist*, who provides access to the media center and makes its resources available for teachers and students.

As a *teacher*, the media specialist instructs students in library information skills and also provides classroom teachers and administrators with staff development opportunities concerning the selection and use of media center resources.

As an *instructional consultant*, the media specialist actively participates in curriculum development, assists classroom teachers in instructional development, and instructs staff in the use of information and instructional technology.

6. ***False.*** While curriculum committees frequently function without the school's library media specialist, they would be better served by using the specialist as a link between students, teachers, and instructional resources. Media specialists can provide curriculum committees with valuable knowledge gained by serving all grade levels and subject areas, and by identifying print and non-print resources to meet specific curricular needs. They can also provide advice about enrichment materials that are available in the marketplace.

7. ***False.*** The type of scheduling in the library media center can determine the influence it will have on the school, curriculum, and students. But survey comments indicate that many principals are unaware of various scheduling options and tend to stick with traditional scheduling, in which teachers bring their classes into the media center once a week to check out books and learn information skills. With this type of scheduling, students are admitted to the center only with their class.

With flexible scheduling, students and teachers can come to the media center whenever they need information, and individual students are welcome there for research or recreational reading at any time of day, regardless of whether or not group instruction is taking place. Class time in the media center is directly related to teaching library skills and applying them to

PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY

This article is in support of the following standards from *Standards for Quality Elementary and Middle Schools* (NAESP 1990):

Leadership. The principal is able to communicate effectively with all segments of the school and the community.

Curriculum. Equipment, supplies, and services needed to support the curriculum are readily available.

classroom work (Karpisek 1989). While flexible scheduling may require additional support staff, it maximizes library access and provides optimum learning experiences.

8. ***False.*** CD-ROM technology is as much at home in the library media center as it is in the computer lab. Much information previously available only in book form is now accessible on CD-ROM disks, including indexes, almanacs, encyclopedias, dictionaries, and geographical resources.

CD-ROM is one of the most recent additions to the computer and audiovisual technology that have changed libraries to media centers. Today, computerized management and catalog systems record and retrieve information about the center's collections, keep track of circulation, and identify software available for curriculum enrichment in such areas as science, math, social studies, and English/language arts.

9. ***False.*** Unfortunately, most principals wait until an accreditation visit is scheduled before turning their attention to the library. Not until then do they seek answers for important questions: Do we have enough books for the number of students? Has the collection been weeded lately? Are students and teachers using the media center frequently? What do we need to update the facility? Is our budget adequate to support its needs? Are we meeting accreditation standards?

Evaluation of the media center and its programs should be an ongoing process, and knowledge of school libraries and the role of media specialists will make the task easier. As one principal commented, "How can we know if media services are up to par if we don't understand what goes on?" It is critical that the principal and the media specialist communicate regularly to make sure that standards are being met. Long-range strategic planning will help the media center to meet the needs of both the school and the community.

Ten Ways to Learn More About Media Centers

1. Attend inservice or conference training sessions.
2. If training is not available, request it from the district or ask a local university to provide staff development training for area principals.
3. Visit area schools with reputations for outstanding library programs. Talk to the principals and media specialists about scheduling, technology, and programming.
4. Request vendors of appropriate computer and audiovisual technology to describe and demonstrate their products.
5. Ask your media specialist to provide professional development activities utilizing information and instructional technology.
6. Ask your media specialist to share a copy of *Information Power* and any applicable state or regional standards for school libraries.
7. Regularly discuss with your media specialist the center's programs, activities, and special needs.
8. Include the media specialist in meetings that involve curriculum and instructional strategies.
9. Ask for summary reports of the media center's activities.
10. Develop a strategic plan with the media specialist to establish and maintain standards for effective operation of the media center.

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10. ***False.*** The media center is no more the librarian's exclusive territory than the classroom is the teacher's. Yet some principals use this as an excuse not to be involved. In answer to the survey question, "Should the management of libraries be part of principals' training?" principals tended to respond with, "That's why I hired a good librarian," or, "I always leave that to the librarian."

Recognition of the media specialist's skills and expertise does not preclude the principal from being knowledgeable about, and supportive of, media center activities. There may even be situations where the principal should insist that the library media specialist be less territorial and more responsive to the needs of the students, teachers, and the community.

Regardless of how you choose to become more knowledgeable about school libraries—inservice training, attendance at conferences, visits to other media centers, or professional readings on the topic—you should also turn to your own media specialist for information and assistance. A working partnership between the principal and the media specialist can go a long way toward changing the library from a stodgy book repository into an exciting, welcoming place filled with rich learning materials and experiences.

For Further Information

To order a copy of *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*, on which this article is based, write to either the American Library Association, 50 East Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611, or the Association of Educational Communications and Technology, 1126 16th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

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